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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH PROVINCE: DE-BA,ATHIFICATION
CONTROVERSY SUBSIDES BUT LINGERS IN SUSPENSION OF DEPUTY
GOVERNOR

REF: 10 BAGHDAD 446 10 BAGHDAD 422

Classified By: Diwaniyah PRT Team Leader Michael Klecheski. Reasons: 1
.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: Diwaniyah Province officials have eased up on their de-Ba,athification campaign, and in their conversations with PRToffs they now downplay plans for its implementation. Yet the de-Ba,athification issue lingers in the suspension of First Deputy Governor Abd Muslim Ghazali, a former mid-level Ba,ath official who is one of the leading Iraqiya candidates in the province. Politicians associated with Governor Salim Alwan,s Da,wa party have told PRToffs that they attribute the suspension, and the leave of absence that Ghazali then took because of illness, to the Deputy Governor,s alleged abuse of office, while politicians associated with Iraqiya tell the PRT that the popular Ghazali is being hounded to weaken his own and his party,s electoral chances in the province. University and sub-provincial government contacts tell PRT that citizens are keenly interested in the election but are confused by the lack of specificity in campaign materials; few parties have clarified their specific platforms. A growing number of PRT contacts say voters will opt for secular over religiously oriented candidates. END SUMMARY .

DE-BA,ATHIFICATION SCALES DOWN(

[12](#). (C) The de-Ba,athification campaign that Governor Alwan and numerous other Diwaniyah politicians had been pursuing (refs A-B) has lost steam over the past week. There have been no demonstrations against Ba,athists in the past week. In a change of tone from previous conversations, Governor Alwan (Da,wa) told the PRT and its military partners on February 23 that the campaign had only been aimed at those with &blood on their hands during the Saddam era and not at former Ba,athists who had been in the party just to further their careers. Dakhil Saihoud (Da,wa), Chairman of the Provincial Council (PC) Committee on Justice and Accountability and Supportive Powers, told PRToffs that the provincial administration would carry through with its plans to take agricultural land leases away from former Ba,athists. The administration would not, however, demote former Ba,athists from leadership positions, as it previously announced it would do. According to Saihoud, that previous announcement had been made to ease the enormous pressure from demonstrators at the height of the anti-Ba,ath campaign in the province, but neither the administration nor the PC had ever intended to implement it.

(BUT LINGERS ON IN A DEPUTY GOVERNOR,S SUSPENSION

[13](#). (C) Nonetheless, there is speculation that the suspension of First Deputy Governor Ghazali marks an indirect use of the anti-Ba,athist campaign to hurt the cross-sectarian Iraqiya coalition,s prospects in Diwaniyah. Ghazali is a former officer in the Saddam-era Iraqi Army and a former Ba,ath party member. He also is the number two candidate on Iraqiya,s list in the province, and many contacts, including Health Department Director of Training Dr. Yahya Nageeb, have told us Ghazali is a popular figure with a good chance of being elected. On February 14,

following media reports citing comments by provincial politicians on Ghazali's Baathist past, the Governor issued an order suspending him. The governor's spokesman told the PRT that the order was based only on the law, which proscribed any provincial administration official from holding his position while also running for office; should Ghazali lose in the elections, he would resume his responsibilities as Deputy Governor, the spokesman insisted. Responsibilities as Deputy Governor, the spokesman insisted. According to PC member Saihoud, who told us he was closely involved in the decision, however, evidence had surfaced that the Deputy Governor was corrupt, had taken unauthorized trips to Baghdad, and had misused government vehicles to pursue his electoral campaign. Immediately following his suspension, Saihoud continued, Ghazali had taken a medical leave of absence to avoid being investigated during the campaign.

¶4. (C) Huda Hmoud Mohsin, Chair of the PC Media Committee (Iraqiya), described Ghazali's case in different terms. She acknowledged that Ghazali had asked for a leave of absence to avoid being investigated. Ghazali had done so, however, because the Governor was falsely accusing him of illegal activities in order to undercut his electoral prospects and that of Iraqiya, Mohsin argued. The elections were shaping up to be fraudulent, Mohsin alleged, with the provincial administration using its powers to manipulate the situation in advance and the Governorate Elections Office (GEO), dominated by Da'wa and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) officials, preparing to allow widespread fraud during the vote count.

INTEREST IN ELECTION, DOUBTS ABOUT CANDIDATES

¶5. (C) In recent conversations with people of various educational and social backgrounds, PRToffs have frequently heard that people are keenly interested in the elections. The public feels overwhelmed by the sheer number of parties

and candidates and the lack of clarity about their platforms.

Shehed Abdullah Shehed, mayor of the Budayr sub-district in the remote east of the province, told the PRT that he expected an 85 percent turnout in his area, although he added that most voters would be participating to socialize with their neighbors rather than because they understood the platforms or genuinely supported candidates. Sami Basheer, a professor of English at Qadissiyah University, told PRToffs that university students are excited about the elections, and he predicted a seventy-five percent turnout among that group.

He added, however, that students are unsure of candidates, platforms, which tempers their enthusiasm somewhat. Several tribal leaders from Mahnawiyah in the province's northwestern corner complained to PRToffs that candidates were relying on posters and platitudes for campaign advertising, so that locals did not understand the candidates, views. Dr. Nageeb of the provincial Health office told PRToffs privately that potential voters are turned off by politicians, empty promises; he said turnout could thus be about fifty percent in the province. Governor Alwan, in his February 23 conversation with the PRT, rated election preparations as good in the province but said there were too many parties in the running, which would lead to a weak Parliament.

A TENDENCY TOWARD SECULAR CANDIDATES

¶6. (C) Even as they air complaints about lack of clarity of candidates, platforms, many of the PRT's contacts report that voters have grown weary of religious-oriented parties and that they are inclined to vote for the more secular ones.

Dr. Nageeb told PRToffs that even rural voters, though seen by many as inclined to support religious parties, are coming to the view that they should vote for technocrats instead. Nageeb continued that the populace is coming to see religious parties as unable to manage a complex government with efficiency and results, whereas technocrats know how to manage. The above-mentioned tribal leaders from Mahniwiyah, who said they favor Iraqiya, made the same point. Qadissiyah professor Basheer also said university students share this view. Afak District Manager (mayor) Majid Hussein Ali, whose brother is an Iraqiya candidate, also echoed this view and said it would redound to Iraqiya's benefit. He predicted that a backlash to the anti-Ba'athist campaign would

similarly help Iraqiya.

INTENSE CAMPAIGNING

¶17. (C) If the public is indeed increasingly impatient with religiously oriented parties, it would likely hit particularly hard at the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI) in Diwaniyah Province. ISCI has long been on the offensive against the current Da,wa-led provincial administration, arguing that its ISCI-led predecessor was far more effective. The governor under that ISCI-led administration, Hamad Musa Khudari, is a leading candidate on the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) ticket who, according to Dr. Nageeb and other PRT contacts, is expected to do well, particularly among the lower classes. Seeking to boost Khudari,s chances, ISCI leader Amaar Hakim conducted a two-day campaign swing through the province. That visit followed a half-day visit by Prime Minister Maliki, who held a State of Law (SLA) campaign rally at Qadissiyah University (as well as a pep talk to Provincial Council and government officials, asking them to do their duties in accordance with the law). Among SLA candidates, several PRT contacts have said that Deputy Speaker of Parliament Khalid al-Atiyah is a shoo-in. They also note that SLA candidate Jabbar Mawat, who Qshoo-in. They also note that SLA candidate Jabbar Mawat, who heads the Martyr,s Association in Diwaniyah, has gained some popularity from the anti-Ba,ath campaign but still suffers under a reputation for corruption. The PRT has not heard about Iraqiya campaign rallies, although Iraqiya candidates, posters feature prominently. One of the most prominent Iraqiya candidate appears to be Aziz Sharif Razam; Nageeb was among several PRT contacts who said that Razam, a wealthy contractor, is widely respected for having spent his own money to build roads, schools and clinics and thus has a strong chance of winning a seat.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The PRT has little doubt that the anti-Ba,ath campaign aimed to weaken Iraqiya,s prospects in the province. Although PRT contacts say that Iraqiya,s top candidate in the province, incumbent CoR member Hussein Sha,alan, is widely seen as almost certain to be reelected, the prospects for that party,s number two candidate, Deputy Governor Ghazali, are less certain. This may explain why, even as the de-Ba,athification issue scaled down in the province as it did throughout the country, Ghazali has come under particularly strong political attack.

¶19. (C) Predicting turnout in the province is difficult. A common refrain in Diwaniyah is that cynicism will temper voter participation; voters were disappointed by the national government,s inability to assist the economically struggling province, and by the ineffectual incumbent Da,wa-led provincial administration as well as its ISCI-led predecessor.

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